

MCPP – Week 26

COA DEVELOPMENT PRACTICAL EXERCISE (PE)

FACULTY SPOOL GUIDE

1. Purpose

This lesson is designed to enable students to demonstrate their knowledge of staff planning by developing courses of action for a given tactical situation.

2. Method

The COA Development PE will be practiced during week 26. COA Development will be taught as a class in seminar and will be followed with a practical exercise. Two hours are scheduled for you to teach COA Development and work the students through the PE requirements. The practical exercise is more of a discussion, led by the instructor, covering the inputs and outputs of COA Development, how to access combat power, and how to complete the COA Development Worksheet. The students role play the Battalion S-3 for 2d Battalion, 6th Marines.

3. Endstate

This lesson is designed to ensure students understand the purpose, considerations, and criteria for developing COAs and how to depict and articulate a COA in graphic and written formats.

4. What to Do

- a. Be familiar with the Commander's Planning Guidance (on CBAE SRP from Mission Analysis), the Commander's Intent and Planning Guidance SRP (handed out at the end of RS&C during Week 25), the EWS COA Development Worksheet, the EWS Relative Combat Power Analysis Worksheet, and, in specific, course of action sketches 1 and 2. Remember, we are still "leveling" the playing field with infantry tactics—we give students the COAs to take into follow-on steps of MCPP. Students simply write the narrative to the graphics we give them. Using these COAs also allows students to "start from the same place" when going into COA Wargaming.
- b. Distribute COA sketches 1 and 2 to the students. In order to facilitate teaching the process and not tactics, the COA sketches (the "artsy" part of COA development) are provided. The students will complete the rest of the worksheet for both COAs during the PE.
- c. To facilitate the discussion and PE, it is recommended that you use butcher block paper or a white board to draw an enlarged COA Development worksheet as an example. Transfer the COA sketches given to the COA Development worksheet in order to facilitate the discussion. Helpful tip to discuss with students—have the same person draw the COA sketches on each worksheet/butcher block. This will allow for easier comparison later because the sketches will be more to scale (in relation to one another).

- d. Recommended timeline:
- 40 minutes to go through slide show and answer questions
 - 20 minutes RCPA
 - 5-minute break
 - 20 minutes COA 1
 - 20 minutes COA 2
 - 15 minutes to review advantages and disadvantages of each COA. Remember, this is rough—include only those things that “jump out” at you—most advantages and disadvantages will be seen and recorded during the COA Wargame. These worksheets are designed as a primary tool to be brought into the COA Comparison and Decision step.
- e. Review major points from the Commander’s Intent and Planning Guidance given the week before and an update of any facts and assumptions. Also use this time to “foot stomp” the importance of beginning a fire support plan in conjunction with the COA. Fire support planning will be taught later in the MAGTF Operations Ashore module.
- f. Assess relative combat power. (page 3-2, MCWP 5-1) Use the RCPA matrix and lead a discussion to compare friendly and enemy strengths and weaknesses using the dynamics of combat power and determine who has the advantage in maneuver, fires, protection, and leadership for this special situation in Old Dominion.
- (1) Maneuver (who has the mobility advantage in regards to force, enemy, and terrain)
 - (2) Fires (direct/indirect/aviation fires. Consider weapons ranges, day/night, and sustainment.
 - (3) Force Protection (ability to disrupt preparation and execution/consider RS&C capabilities)
 - (4) Leadership (unit organization, combat experience, training, commander, communications)
- g. It is recommended that you work initially with COA sketch 1. Once all requirements are complete for COA 1 (narrative and advantages/disadvantages), proceed to COA 2 and do the same.
- h. It is recommended that you review how the COA sketch was built:
- (1) Draw prominent terrain features (key and identifiable) (colors are okay for clarity).
 - (2) Add control measures (LD/obj/boundaries/AA/PL).
 - (3) Identify critical vulnerability.
 - (4) Identify ME and SE task and purpose.
 - (5) Draw maneuver and any additional control measures. Remember to keep the sketch generic—no specific units identified and avenues of approach labeled AA 1 vice axis, direction of attack or route.
- i. Review the five criteria of COA development (suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete) on page 3-3, MCWP 5-1, and discuss whether COA 1 (and later 2) conforms to them.

- (1) Suitability. Will the COA reasonably accomplish the identified objectives, mission, or task if carried out successfully?
 - (2) Feasibility. Can the COA be executed using the available resources in the available timeframe?
 - (3) Acceptability. Is the COA worth the cost in manpower, material, and time involved?
 - (4) Distinguishability. Is the COA clearly unique from other COAs?
 - (5) Completeness. Does the COA answer what type of action is contemplated? When, where, and how it will be accomplished?
- j. Review the elements of the COA narrative (overview, ME, SE, reserve, priority of fires) and have the students individually write the narrative for COA 1. **The COA narrative should be a word picture!** The overview statement should address the type of operation, forms of maneuver used, and distribution of forces.
- (1) In the offense, the type of operation is either movement to contact, attack, exploit, or pursue.
 - (2) The offensive forms of maneuver are frontal attack, penetration, flank attack, envelopment, turning movement, and infiltration.
 - (3) **See MCDP 1-0 for a thorough explanation of these types and forms.**
- k. Select a student to post his narrative for COA 1 on the COA Development worksheet drawn on the butcher block paper or whiteboard and brief his narrative to the seminar. Debrief his product.
- l. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the COA and capture on the separate advantages/disadvantage worksheet. Advantages/disadvantages are designed to help the commander decide if the COA is worth developing further. Try not to be too overly analytical—it just has to make sense. It's not an analysis, but it paves the way for wargaming later.
- m. Once the narrative and advantages/disadvantages are completed for COA 1, proceed to COA 2.
- n. Distribute the SRP upon completion. This SRP will be the start point for COA Wargame.

5. Lessons Learned

- a. COA sketches are not the same—making it more difficult to compare later.
- b. Paralysis through analysis and too much detail can occur.
- c. One COA given to students does not meet all the criteria of COA Development.
- d. In the COA referenced in 5c, maneuver, fires, and intel are not mutually supporting; they function in stovepipe fashion.
- e. Students have difficulty transferring the COA narrative into a concept of operations. Specifically, many times the avenues of approach drawn on the COA sketch transcribe into an axis in the concept of operation.
- f. The supporting effort's task and purpose do not relate to the main effort.